War landscapes as ‘battlefields’ of collective memories: reading the Reflections at Bukit Chandu, Singapore

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This paper examines the commemoration of the Second World War in the non-Western context of Singapore. It argues that the Singaporean state has viewed the war – fought when Singapore was still part of a larger colonial entity that was British Malaya – as a means of raising the awareness of a 'shared history' among its citizens. We first outline how the task of appropriating Singaporean war memory in the postcolonial present may be potentially inflected by a myriad of local as well as transnational challenges. Then, drawing on one particular national memoryscape dedicated to the war, the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu,* we explore some of the strategies the state has adopted to mitigate these. Finally, we illustrate, from visitors' perspectives, how contestations over the site's (post)colonial geography, history and representations of race have continued to make the site highly contentious. On a larger canvas, we demonstrate how national appropriations of the past can become fraught 'battlefields' of collective memories from 'within' as well as 'without' the nation.

Collective memory, far from being primordial, is a social construct that is constantly (re)valorized to serve present circumstances, frequently as the rudimentary building blocks upon which a national past and historical continuity may be 'invented'.[1] As a 'myth-making' process, collective memory has been appropriated not only to legitimate the nation as an 'imagined community' but also to allow citizens to feel a certain belonging to the state.[2] Geographers, in particular, have sought to illuminate how collective memory is commonly spatialized through the material and symbolic shaping of memoryscapes (or memorial landscapes).[3] Some have averred that in spatially (re)crafting the past for purposes of nation-building, history is often sanitized, similarities highlighted and differences diffused, as a way of imposing an 'order in which one (or perhaps a few) dominant ways of seeing are substituted for all ways of seeing'.[4] Hence, marked as much by forgetting as by remembering, memory-making becomes necessarily political. However, what is manifested as national memory

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– through the manipulation of the past via space – is profoundly unstable and may not always be accepted by those in the position to 'read' and decipher it.[5] Since dominant memories, as 'articulated by privileged elites and capable of universal articulation in specific spaces', may either be reinforced or contested by 'more widely shared memories and myths that are fluid, contested and plural',[6] it has become 'neither possible nor desirable to insist on a single, objective and authoritative reading of any place or historic moment'.[7] Rather, it is more realistic to consider the semiotic of memoryscapes as a 'palimpsest of overlapping multi-vocal landscapes',[8] each seeking to defend – discursively and materially – its own historical memory as the bona fide one.

These contentions over memories (and memoryscapes) within a nation can arise from both 'within' and 'without' the territorial boundaries of its geo-body. From within, conflicts over how memoryscapes may be read can arise over racial or other defining lines that divide society or when the state and its people disagree over interpretations of a memorial's vested meanings.[9] Exogenous forces, however, have attracted lesser attention, which led Ashplant *et al.* to counsel the need for current studies on war commemoration that are more 'sensitive to the dynamics of change … operating transnationally, and the ways in which these impact within national contexts'.[10] Indeed, national memory can be 'read' not only by the people of the nation but also by the international public. This includes other nations, war tourists and those with direct communal ties to the remembered event, such as veterans of the war and their family members. Such transnational investments are testified to by the rising number of people now engaging in battlefield tourism and overseas pilgrimages to war and memorial sites.[11]

Transnational tensions over memory spaces can also be provoked by the changing postcolonial geopolitics and sociopolitical realities introduced by the emancipatory character of wars such as the First and Second World Wars. In such cases, where previously colonized nation-states are formed, and faced with the task of having to build their own 'imagined community' based on differentiating their independent selves from their former colonists, conflicts and diplomatic frictions may abound when nations claim the past as their own, appropriating it to fit national projects by downplaying – if not 'censoring' – the significance of the event to other nations.[12] In this paper, we show how postcolonial tensions over memoryscapes may emerge not only out of a nation-state's intent to set its national memory apart from that of its former imperialist(s) but also out of the simultaneous desire to distinguish itself from other nations with whom it might share a colonially-linked pre-independence history (and geography). To this end, we reflect upon the Singapore state's national commemoration of Singaporean involvement during the Second World War – a postcolonial appropriation of what was essentially a colonial war which took place when Singapore was territorially still part of British Malaya (which also included what is today Malaysia) – and its inflection by local as well as transnational challenges.

Specifically, by illuminating the case of the *Reflections of Bukit Chandu*[13] – a state-sanctioned memorial to the Malay Regiment, a force made up of 'local' volunteers (from

colonial British Malaya) which took part in one of the last battles before Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942 – we outline some of the strategies the state has adopted to mitigate challenges to its nationalization of the war. As a means of exhibiting the potentially 'fraught' nature of 'postcolonial memory',[14] the paper then proceeds to illustrate how issues and debates related to the site's geography and (re)presentations of history and race, as well as Singapore's colonial and postcolonial ties with Malaysia, have continued to make the site highly contentious.

Nationalizing the Second World War in Singapore

Central to the commemoration of the Second World War in Singapore is the question of just whose war this was. First, as the war was mainly fought by 'foreign' soldiers,[15] it has been asserted that Singapore was merely a 'battlefield' of foreign powers, where 'local' inhabitants – mainly migrants and a proportion of British subjects – were nothing more than spectators and victims of 'someone else's war'. Second, there is debate over whether the war should be seen as part of the extending tentacles of Japanese imperialism or a means of 'liberating' the locals from European colonization.[16] This has to be seen in the light of how some of the locals – mainly within the Malay and Indian communities – were seen as working against the efforts of the Allied forces by making pacts with the Japanese to achieve their own goals to rid themselves of British domination.[17] It was therefore not entirely clear if this was a war of aggression or liberation, and whether the Japanese were 'liberators' or 'the enemy'. Given such muddy interpretations, the war became a problematic thing for the state to remember. In fact, local war commemoration by the state began very late in the 1980s and, even then, primarily to meet demands by foreign veterans for the war to be remembered – and consumed – *in situ*.[18]

This changed in 1992 when the task of remembering the war became more of a national affair. The war was designated a pertinent ingredient in Singapore's nation-building in response to the sentiment that Singapore was becoming a city without a 'soul', where the overwhelming focus on capitalistic concerns and rapid economic development had all but obliterated cultural and heritage considerations.[19] It was found that many Singaporeans were not even familiar with their 'own' history.[20] The governing elites therefore became increasingly apprehensive of the dangers of Singaporeans losing their 'Asian' roots, and began to see the need to reclaim Singapore's 'heritage' as a vital anchor on which a national (Singaporean) consciousness could be built.[21] In this vein, the 'heritage' of war was eminently suitable to be pressed into the service of nation-building, reworked as a prelude to nationalism, the event that liberated the nation from Western colonialism and awakened Singaporeans to the need 'not to depend on others for our defence'.[22] In addition, the war was also seen as apposite to the scripting of 'local' war heroes, whereby

> [l]ionizing exemplary fallen soldiers, woven into the narrative of nation-building, [can] generate a sense of history, legacy and inspiration for new generations, creating an unbroken national memory with a troubled past which must never be forgotten.[23]

Since the early 1990s, the Singapore state had increased its efforts to remember its war past, with the war years now included as necessary chapters in the *Singapore Story,* an anthology of historical accounts tracing the nation's roots.[24] The state has also 'written' its war past onto its material landscapes by marking numerous war-related sites with plaques and other commemorative gestures 'to remind Singapore's young of the major war events'.[25] As a result, memorial sites proliferated on the nation's landscapes.[26] From something the state initially shied away from remembering, the war has now become a very visible aspect of Singapore's nationalist apparatus. Despite the state's efforts, however, it can be said that many of the nation's war memorials are still focused on 'foreign' war participants. For example, the Changi Chapel and Museum, one of the prominent earlier state-driven attempts to remember the war, emphasizes the experiences of the (foreign) interned soldiers (vis-à-vis the locals) in Singapore. This may be explained by these sites having mainly been the product of lobbying by returning (foreign) ex-POWs who wanted their role in the war to be remembered.[27] The perception by Singaporeans that the war was a foreign affair has also served to explain their nonchalant attitude towards, and general absence from, state commemorative efforts. Yet, if narratives of war are to be successfully drawn into discourses of nation-building, there is a need to highlight the fact that the locals were not complete truants from the war, or absent from sites which remember the war. In this light, one newly minted site, *Reflections of Bukit Chandu* (hereafter referred to as the Centre), presents an interesting anomalous case set apart from other 'foreign-oriented' sites.

Local and transnational challenges to nationalizing the Centre

The Centre was officially inaugurated on 15 February 2002, the 60th anniversary of the day Singapore was surrendered to the Japanese (Figure 1).[28] The task had fallen to the National Archives of Singapore (hereafter NAS)[29] to convert a two-storey colonial-style bungalow, sited at a ridge known as Bukit Chandu (by virtue of the British *Chandu* or opium-packing plant located nearby), into an interpretive centre for remembering the battle at Pasir Panjang, where the Malay Regiment (hereafter MR) faced the Japanese in intense combat.[30] The Centre relates stories of heroism and desperation as the MR fought valiantly on the ridge and held the Japanese for two days until they were out of ammunition. Forced to fight the enemy in hand-to-hand combat, the MR was almost destroyed. Within the Centre, accounts of the battle are related through storyboards, and supplemented with artefacts acquired from overseas institutions as well as living relatives of the MR's men.[31] One prominent personality featured within the Centre is Lt Adnan Saidi, an officer of the MR who displayed extreme strength of character as he led his men against the Japanese before he was sacrificed at bayonet point (Figure 2). In line with the idea of 'reflections' indicated in its name, the Centre aims to encourage its visitors to 'reflect' upon the courage of the MR's men and internalize their positive attributes.[32] The main message of the Centre, as cited by a NAS officer, echoes the master narrative of the war:

FIGURE 1 The *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* War Interpretive Centre

> The Centre reflects upon the story of one of the battles in Singapore before the surrender, something we cannot afford to ignore [as] the Occupation paved the way for the desire not to be under the British or Japs [*sic*] any more . . . it is a move to independence.

More significantly, by recounting the trials and ordeals of the MR during the war, the site presents a unique opportunity to showcase the heroism of the 'local' Malays, as a means of showing that the war was not solely fought by foreigners but that 'locals' too played a part. By illuminating one of the few battles that involved the 'locals', the Centre also counters the 'foreign'-centricity of remembrance thus far, hence making it more amenable for the state to capitalize on the war as a tool of nation-building. Hence, beyond the rationale of just honouring the men of the MR, the Centre has been elevated as a national site all Singaporeans should visit.

Apart from the 'nationalistic' aims of the Centre, it was also meant to satisfy a demand by members of the Malay community for the role of the Malays in the war to be remembered. In the early to mid-1990s, there was a public outcry over the news that a colonial bungalow located near where the battle of Pasir Panjang took place – which, according to the many letters and forum articles, could be used to relate in greater detail the stories of the MR – was about to be handed over to private developers.[33] This public pressure, in addition to the state's realization that such a site could be utilized as a way of promoting the war as a more 'local' event, were some of the main factors that

FIGURE 2 A bust of Lt. Adnan Saidi commissioned for the Centre

led to the bungalow being passed on to the NAS. Moreover, while there were memorials sprinkled around Singapore where 'local' stories are told, most of them tended to highlight the Chinese. The director of the NAS, Pitt Kuan Wah, admitted that 'the records of those who fought had been unbalanced in the past, focusing mainly on the role of the British and the Chinese'.[34] In that sense, the Centre, with its Malay focus, provided NAS with the chance to set right the imbalance, hence reflecting its attempt to be even-handed in its commemorative projects, ensuring that all within the nation have a share of public memorial space.[35]

Despite the twin bases for setting up the Centre, the 'ethnic' precursor was clouded over by the more nationalistic motive. The playing down of Malay memory by the NAS can be better understood in the light of the political reality that Singapore is a society comprising four ethnic groups,[36] where ethnic affiliations can present themselves as 'sources of entropy and slippage' to the state's formation.[37] In producing a national site such as the Centre, NAS cannot appear to be favouring any one ethnic group. It is therefore not surprising that the NAS did not want to play up the ethnic significance of the site as one specifically for the Malays. As Pitt emphasizes, 'the Centre is not just about the Malay community fighting in the war. It is about universal values of duty, honour and courage'.[38] The concern lies in the fact that, while the Centre helps to capitalize on a particular 'local' force that fought during the war, by virtue of the ethnicity of the MR it might appeal only to the Malays, alienating members of other ethnicities within the nation. A secondary concern may lie in the notion that

overemphasizing the positive role of the Malays during the war may produce counter-memories emphasizing how some Malays worked with the Japanese to overthrow the British. In the light of 'nationalizing' the site for all Singaporeans, it would be as well to keep hidden this past 'treachery' of the Malays.

Apart from these more 'internal' concerns, a transnational challenge lies in the postcolonial contention that the men of the MR were not even Singaporeans to begin with, even though the battle did take place in Singapore. Notwithstanding the fact that the MR was not fighting for Singapore *per se* but for the British empire, which might already discount them as being truly 'Singaporean' heroes,[39] the men, such as Lt Adnan Saidi, also included soldiers originating from what is today Malaysia.[40] When the war took place, Singapore and Malaysia were still conjoined as part of colonial British Malaya.[41] This begs the question as to whose heroes the MR represent: Malaysia's or Singapore's? This is a point of contention especially when one considers that Malaysia too has sought to honour Lt Adnan Saidi in its own way. The Malaysian Defence Ministry, for example, has named a tank after him to remember its 'son' who paved the way for Malaysian independence in 1957.[42] A posthumous bravery award has also been bestowed on him by the Malaysian government for his heroism during the war.[43] The 'battle' of claims between both sides of the Causeway has also found its way into the realm of film-making. In 1999, a docudrama was produced by the Malaysian Defence Ministry to portray the bravery of Adnan Saidi, 'who was killed in a battle with Japanese troops in Singapore during World War II'.[44] Singapore too has its own docudrama produced in 2001, *Bukit Chandu*, to showcase the MR and the battle at Pasir Panjang.

A comparison of the two docudramas is telling. In one, the coverage of the war as scripted by the Malaysians had a heavier emphasis on the MR prior to their coming to Singapore: their families and their homes in what is Malaysia today. The narrative concerned with Singapore and the battle in which Lt Adnan Saidi and his comrades died is only in the film's finale, despite the significance of the battle of Pasir Panjang in the broader 'myth-making' narrative of the MR. The Singaporean film, as reflected in the geographical emphasis of its title, focuses almost wholly on the battle itself and minimally on prior narrative, prompting one historian to conclude:

> [T]he representation between the two movies reflects the different ways in which the two countries have remembered the MR and make the heroism of the men their own. While the focus by Malaysia is social and historical, the one in Singapore was geographical'.[45]

Given that the men of the MR were mainly from the 'mainland' of Malaya, the only claim that Singapore has to their heroism lies in the fact that they fought on Singapore soil. Thus, some question the rationale of the Singaporean nation laying claim to what is not 'the exclusive property of Singapore'.[46] As Singapore's then Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, stated: '[Since] Adnan [Saidi] has been made a role model and an inspiration for the Malaysian armed forces as well [it] would reduce his suitability as a national hero in Singapore.'[47]

The contested identity of the MR is compounded by the fact that the two contending nations are still marked by 'a generally tense (postcolonial) relation with the leadership

on both sides invoking nationalist sentiments by demonizing one another'.[48] For example, in 1987, when Singapore's then Deputy Prime Minister made a comment doubting the commitment of Singaporean Malays to defend the nation should war break out with Malaysia, it was the Malaysian Malays who challenged their Singaporean 'counterparts' to respond to the question of how the latter could live as citizens of a nation that does not even trust them. In the challenge, the MR was cited by the Malaysians as an instance of how the Malay community *can* indeed be trusted in dire times of war.[49] Postcolonial independence has meant that the two now separate nation-states are continually involved in criticizing each other's domestic politics, especially where issues about the 'Malay' race are concerned, reflecting the durable power of 'race' as an emotive category within and across nations in a postcolonial world. Hence, far from the Centre becoming 'the embodiment of the will [of both states] to resolve regional conflict and help nurture ... benefits',[50] it now has the potential of reopening wounds that still fester between the two postcolonial nation-states.

Mitigating challenges, creating a site for all

Given its focus on the Malays, the nation's problematic (post)colonial ties with Malaysia and the presence of foreign commemorators with interest in the site, imaging the Centre as one that reflects upon Singapore's nation-building was politically risky. As a means of sidestepping these challenges, the NAS instituted a number of spatial strategies within the Centre. Most immediately obvious is the Centre's toponymic inscription. Despite myriad suggestions as to how it should be named – such as *Last Defence at Pasir Panjang* and *Tribute to the Malay Regiment* – the name Bukit Chandu was selected in keeping with the geographical salience of the area as 'where the MR fought most fiercely'.[51] This adoption of the local *Malay* name of the area might suggest an attempt to 'localize' the history of the battle by 'redrawing the connections to the community level'.[52] Certainly, the choice of Bukit Chandu can be contrasted to the more British-alluded Kent Ridge Park – named after the late Duchess of Kent[53] – where the original MR memorial from the 1990s still stands. But it also signals a more complicated emphasis on the localization of the Centre.

In terms of location, for instance, the site capitalizes on the symbolic investment of being 'near where the battle happened', which helps to instil a 'special aura' and 'sense of place' where 'the cruelty of war, death, fear, pain and hopelessness [can be] made powerfully present'.[54] As the then Minister for Trade and Industry put it, 'when you remember that the men had defended the ridge and fought a withdrawal battle and died there, you feel that this is hallowed ground'.[55] The National Heritage Board's Deputy Director also revisited this point later:

> [T]o place exhibits and tell the stories in their historical context ... provides more scope to enhance the 'experience' ... For instance, to view the exhibit, and 'hear' and 'see' the heroism of the Malay Regiment fighting and dying almost at the exact spot where it all happened years ago is a sobering and touching experience.[56]

In addition, by highlighting the salience of where the battle of Pasir Panjang took place, the location represents a strong justification for Singapore to honour the MR as its own, since the men were defending the ridge and thus, by extension, Singapore. Although the actual site of the battle had already been developed into a car park well before the idea for the memorial was mooted,[57] the present site has the advantage of at least allowing a view of the original scene of battle. The bungalow itself also has claims made for and through it. It was 'an ammunition store for the British during the war', and is presented as 'where the MR spent some time before the battle', hence conjuring up a further sense of 'colonial history'.[58] NAS also restored the bungalow to its former 'colonial' glory and planted 'tapioca and lalang trees', characteristic of the vegetation that used to flourish in the area, as a way of creating 'a more historically sympathetic setting' and 'invoke that sense of connection to items [such as tapioca] remembered as synonymous with shortages of rice and other commodities' during the Occupation years.[59] These selections might also have been driven by the desire to choose plants that unambiguously identify the site as 'local' rather than foreign.[60]

Technologically assisted simulations and commissioned performances were instrumental in recreating 'actual' battle scenes within the memorial so as to enhance the historical 'mystique' of the site,[61] and permit visitors to experience the imagined visions, sensations and sounds of the war. More generally, this reflects how NAS has adopted an emotionally charged approach, focusing on empathy with the experiences of the men rather than on their ethnicity or nationality. In one section, visitors are encouraged to pick up a mock telephone that enables them to hear individual testimonies of what happened during the war, dramatically spiced with occasional sobbing and tremors of the voice (Figure 3). For instance, one telephone allows visitors to learn of the story of Lt. Ibrahim, one of the MR's men, from the impassioned recollection of his wife:

> Lt Ibrahim was executed in February 1942 for defying Japanese orders to remove his Malay Regiment uniform. His body was never found. For the last 60 years, this army-issued tin mug has been [my] one and only keepsake from [my] husband.[62]

In another section of the site, visitors are invited to look into mirrors (aptly called the 'mirrors of reflection') featuring quotes and excerpts drawn from 'war diaries, Lt Adnan's family's memories, and thoughts from other families and soldiers' of the MR so that visitors can reflect upon 'memories of tradition, patriotism, death before dishonour [and] struggle'.[63] The NAS has also included a 'well of reflection' that encourages visitors literally to look into a well to see the reflection of an overhead diorama depicting several scenes of the battle. The strategy here is to allow visitors' own reflections to be mirrored, hence visually projecting themselves onto the reflected landscapes of the battle. In doing so, visitors are presumably 'transplanted' onto the reflected battle scenes, allowing them to 'root' themselves amidst the MR ranks, reflect on the men's experiences *in situ*, and hence 'connect' themselves on a more personal level with the ideals for which the MR soldiers were fighting (e.g. 'defence of homeland'). According to Brunero, 'it is this idea of connection that again – literally and metaphorically – harks to the Centre's ideas of "rootedness" and being connected to a place.'[64]

FIGURE 3 The mock telephones within the Centre

In terms of the emotive appeal of the site, it is designed to be a place where *all* Singaporeans – not just Malays – can 'reflect' on the heroism of the MR. The Centre has also been explicitly deracialized: there has been an attempt to prevent the site from becoming too focused on any particular race or ethnicity by also including various representations of the others. For example, an exhibition of paintings by a former Chinese resident of Pasir Panjang who experienced the bombings as a 10-year-old, and who also witnessed the killing of his parents by the Japanese, is included.[65] One of the mock telephones also has this individual speaking of these experiences (in Mandarin, with accompanying English translation). The act of deracializing the Centre's narratives, we argue, also serves another function: to distinguish a postcolonial Singapore (where the state seeks to unify its multiracial citizens as one) from a colonial one (where the British sought to segregate the different ethnic groups).[66] By including the narratives of the other races, the Centre thus seeks to stress that the war was something experienced by all ethnic groups, not just the Malays – yet another postcolonial rescripting (and hence differentiation) vis-á-vis the colonial period.

Another way in which the site is made less ethnically specific, and thus more 'national', is in its generalized coverage of history. As one NAS officer involved in the project, comments, the Centre 'tells the larger story of defence in Malaya against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion plan'.[67] The idea that the Centre is to become a memorial for all is also reflected in its official brochure:

> It is not just a WWII Museum. It is not about POWs only. Neither is it just a memorial to the last moments of the 1st and 2nd Battalion of the Malay Regiment. It is to be a place for reflection – a place for the people of today; a place to reflect upon the deeds of peoples who valued honour and strength of character above their own lives …[68]

Hence, rather than dealing solely with the story of the MR, the project has become more of an interpretive centre, which deals with the battle of Pasir Panjang as just one of many in the war. While the focus is on the MR, most of the quotations on the Centre's panel displays concern the experiences of the British and the Japanese. For example, in the transcript of the Centre's audio-tour the NAS inserted many anecdotal accounts of British and Japanese soldiers and hardly any from the MR's men themselves, which is strange given the Centre's primary focus on the MR.[69] Among its major exhibits, there is also a prison cell mock-up (representing Changi Prison, where most of the foreign soldiers were incarcerated during the Japanese Occupation).[70]

Aside from allowing foreign visitors to identify more closely with this generic treatment of the war, we argue that such a strategy of 'recasting' a specific battle onto a larger template of the war also attempts to divert attention away from the Malay-centeredness of this battle. The Centre's emphasis is on more universal values such as 'rootedness', 'heroism' and 'courage', which the NAS hopes can be aspects of the MR reflected upon, internalized and emulated by all visitors to the site, regardless of their ethnicity. Moreover, by abstracting the positive qualities of the MR rather than focusing on their ethnicity, the Centre supports NAS's intention to depict the MR as 'national' as opposed to 'Malay heroes'.[71] By downplaying the ethnicity of the MR, the men's virtues then become virtues that all Singaporeans, regardless of their race, may emulate. Stripped of their ethnicity, the soldiers then become ordinary men who gave up their lives in defence of what they considered their 'homeland'. In that sense, the MR's men are promoted as 'heroes' that the whole nation (instead of just the Malay community) may be proud of.

The 'nationalization' of this heroism is complex. For instance, despite the Centre's status as a national (war) site, where visitors are encouraged to ponder the 'heroism' of the MR, there is no explicit mention of the MR as the defenders of 'Singapore' *per se*. Instead, the Centre encourages Singaporean visitors to recognize and then emulate the MR's positive virtues of courage and patriotism, regardless of the fact that these men may not necessarily be Singaporean. This, according to Brunero, is done in the hope of placing the experiences of the MR within the context of a much 'broader scope of nationhood' before Singapore and Malaysia even came into existence, hence enabling a more postcolonial nationalist appropriation of what was essentially a colonial nationalist war. In that light, the men were actually 'fighting for Malaya and what they considered their home regardless of colonial boundaries'.[72] This then serves to deflect counter-arguments that men of the MR were not Singaporean heroes, at the same time also making the Centre generic for all visitors, Singaporeans as well as Malaysians.

Alternative reflections: contentions over geography and history

Thus far, we have shown how the Centre has metamorphosed – through the creative engagement of 'tactics of localization' – from an ethnically focused commemoration of the MR into a site devoid of any ethnic foregrounding. Visitors to the site have remarked, for example, on the timeliness of the Centre in redressing what has thus far been an overemphasis on the 'foreigners at war' by focusing, as one Chinese visitor puts it, 'on remembering the locals who fought in the war, rather than just the British and Australians', suggesting that visitors have indeed generally perceived the MR more in terms of 'local' (rather than 'Malay') heroes. Another visitor, a Malay student on a field trip, commented, 'I never knew that there were local people who joined in the fighting . . . this is definitely an inspiring knowledge to gain for all Singaporeans'. Visitors also thought positively of the indigeneity of the multifarious strategies to allow visitors to 'reflect' upon – and thus 'connect' with – the heroism of the MR. For instance, in speaking about the 'well of reflection', one Chinese visitor had this to say:

> It was indeed smart to have us look into the well where our reflection can be seen as part of the war itself . . . I can then imagine myself as one of the Regiment's men putting the nation first before my own life, just like the men did.

In that sense, popular reactions to the Centre since its launch have been encouraging and largely in line with what the NAS had in mind when it deracialized the site and introduced the concept of 'reflections' as a way of involving the visitors more intimately with the memory of the MR. The visitors, particularly non-Malays, tend to overlook the ethnicity of the MR to see the men as, in the words of a Chinese visitor, 'just our Singaporean sons who fought for the nation and courageously died for it'. However, despite these positive reviews, there has also been much scepticism, particularly among the Malay community, about the 'true' purpose of the site. The main accusation levelled is captured by a comment made by a Malay visitor: '*Bukit Chandu* is a political thing not so much to remember the Malays, but merely to shut us up.'

Such interpretations have first to be understood in the light of a perceived marginalization of the Malays in Singapore. For example, it has been said that Malays have been largely 'prevented' from participating in 'sensitive' vocations within the local military for reasons of 'national security' so as to 'avoid placing Malays in an awkward position when loyalty to the nation and religion came into conflict'.[73] It has also been suggested that the Malays have not been given the 'parity of status' emblematic of Singapore's strategy of multiracialism, resulting in the continuous marginalization of the community, socially as well as economically.[74] In that light, it is not surprising that the Centre has been perceived, especially by the Malay community, as a further political move to 'silence' them and their historical memory. The question then is: from the standpoint of the Malays, how has the Centre served to perpetuate this sentiment? In analysing the views of visitors to the site, two main contentions emerged: the geography of the site, and the way the history of the MR has been rendered within it.

Generally, visitors do appreciate the fact that the site is located close to where the real battle took place.[75] One Malay visitor said, 'I am glad that [the Centre] is located here as here was where the MR courageously fought the Japanese. I am proud to be standing where the men used to stand.' One entry in the visitors' book reads: 'Thanks to the men of the MR who shed their blood right here where we are standing so that we may live.' However, there are also complaints that the Centre is too inaccessible.[76] While a few visitors have trudged up to the site, most still reach it by private vehicles or chartered buses.[77] More detrimentally, given the ethnically charged situation in Singapore, the distant location of the site has also led to the belief that this is another way the state is ensuring that the history of the Malays is progressively forgotten. As one Malay visitor puts it, 'they put [the Centre] up there so that nobody can go up. If nobody goes up, people will slowly forget'. This perception that geography is used as a political tool to marginalize the Malays is compounded by limited promotion of the site. As the former manager of the Centre puts it, 'accessibility is one [factor], awareness is another; there are brochures but they are not widely distributed; the signboard at the foot of the hill is also hidden'. As such, NAS's strategy of *in situ* commemoration – to capitalize on the geohistorical imaginary of the landscape – has also been perceived in more racialized terms by some members of the Malay community as a form of marginalization.

The 'placing' of the Centre, and NAS's claim that it was sited where the battle took place, has also been problematic in another way. While some have accepted the claim that the bungalow was where Lt Adnan Saidi stayed before the battle, others remain unconvinced. According to one Malay visitor who visited the Centre in 2002, 'it is a weak link between the site and the MR ... some said this was the bungalow where Adnan stayed before the battle and others say it is another one [which has already been demolished] ... I have no idea which is the truth.' This confusion might be due to the fact that, up till now, there has not been any absolute historical verification of this usage. A historian, who prefers to be anonymous, clarified:

> [T]he tenuous link between the bungalow and the MR, I think, started out as a rumour, started because the NAS was given the bungalow to be utilized... That's about when the stories of how the men of the MR used to stay in the bungalow emerged.

In that sense, the rumour that associates the MR with the bungalow might have been merely an uncorroborated fact that was subsequently passed off as the truth, perhaps as a means of raising public interest in the bungalow (and its conversion into a war interpretive centre), and making it more (authentically) worthwhile for people to come and visit.

There is also the fact that, earlier on, the state had already honoured the MR at Kent Ridge Park.[78] One Chinese man remarked, 'All this time, we have been brought to believe that the battle took place at Kent Ridge Park ... but now they say it is at this ridge'. These confusions downgrade the credibility of the site; as another visitor stated, 'if I find out that there is no connection between the MR and the site, I will be angry at how the MR's story has been manipulated to cheat us.' Aside from the criticism that the NAS has 'over-read' the historical significance of the bungalow, it was also mentioned

by critics that there have not been enough attempts to identify other landmarks within the bungalow's vicinity. According to one visitor:

> If the site was set up here because it was where the battle took place, it sure has not made it very clear. For example, there is hardly mention that the battle took place at the car park, giving the impression that the battle took place at the bungalow itself. Also, some other parts of the surroundings such as the former opium factory, which is still there, should also be marked so that visitors will not miss these actual sites of battle.

There is also criticism that there is not enough focus on the history of the MR. Despite the site's claim to highlight the Malay soldiers who gallantly fought the Japanese, some visitors felt that the focus has been somewhat 'watered down' by the emphasis on other battles in the war. This comment may have been inspired by the docudrama movie produced in Malaysia in 1999. As one Malay Singaporean visitor elaborated:

> I watched 'Leftenan Adnan' [the Malaysian docu-drama], which is more historically detailed. It showed us what the MR's men were like, their families, children and home towns. We hardly learn these things from the [Centre]. The beliefs and religion of the men that made them the way they are have also been ignored.

The Centre's lack of coverage of the MR's history before the battle has provoked criticism that it has ignored the process of how they became heroes. In other words, for visitors to emulate the heroism of these men, some argue that there is a need to also 'reflect' upon the religion, family upbringing and principles that led them to become heroes – not just upon the MR's actions during the battle of Pasir Panjang. Heroism is not, for these critics, purely individual or part of a universal human ideal. For them, it is a quality that is also cultivated through the soldiers' religion (i.e. Islam) and upbringing (in a close-knitted Malay family), yet another sign of the Malay visitors' tendency towards a more ethnocentric (*vis-à-vis* national) reading of the Centre.

Some visitors were also puzzled by the inclusion of the prison cell and the experiences of the foreign ex-POWs: 'Why is there a prison cell here? There was no prison at Bukit Chandu, or was there?' Another Malay visitor was also heard to remark, upon reaching the exhibit of the Chinese paintings: 'Oh no, not the Chinese again', a reflection of the fact that much of what is commemorated in Singapore has focused on the experiences of the Chinese, reinforcing the idea that it is not possible for Malays to be represented here without being sinicized. In deracializing the site to prevent it from being Malay-centric, the state has inadvertently also ensured that visitors think in 'racial' terms. In that sense, the NAS's attempts to eliminate (racial) difference has made such differences much starker. According to the NAS officer in change of the site:

> Out of the walk-ins each day, 90 per cent is Malays, and their perception is that it is a site to honour the *Malay* Regiment. Hence, upon realizing that the stories of the Malays have not been covered enough, it naturally led to disappointment for some of them.

Hence, it can be said that, despite the NAS's intentions – through its multiple strategies – to prevent the Centre from appealing only to the Malay segment of the population, by virtue of the Centre's focus on the MR as the main highlight it has inevitably achieved the opposite effect.

Despite NAS's attempts to manoeuvre around the problematic issue of who the heroism of the MR belongs to, some of the visitors have also continued to raise this question, which has served to mar the ability of Singaporeans to truly identify with the MR as Singapore's heroes. As one Chinese visitor said when asked if she thought the MR should be called 'our national heroes':

> Bukit Chandu is all about the Malays, but not all of them were Singaporean Malays, some were Malaysian Malays . . . there is always that disagreement on whether Adnan is Singaporean or Malaysian . . . each of us call him our war hero . . . but who is right?

The issue was also raised by the NAS officer in charge of the memorial site:

> This site resonates not only with the local Singaporeans but also with those from around the region, who saw it as a place where they could reflect upon war and peace and ponder universal themes like survival and suffering. But I have also observed Malaysian visitors to the site who have simply walked out or frowned throughout their visit to the site.

This comment emphasizes that while the universalized narratives and emotionally charged portrayals of the war within the site may have made it appealing to some non-Malays, others resent the depiction of the MR as Singaporean heroes, such as Malaysians who have been told that the men of the MR are, by virtue of their origin and race, Malaysian heroes. As such, despite the intentions of NAS, the debate over the MR's identity has continued to problematize the site as a distinct symbol of a specifically postcolonial Singapore nation. There are, however, still those who see these claims and counter-claims as the petty bids of nationalism. As one Chinese interviewee who occasionally guides visitors at the Centre said:

> At that time, Malaysia and Singapore was not even in existence; we were still under the British government. So why lay claim on them? This was a neutral body. What we want to look at is their courage and commitment . . . more important than who owns them.

Final 'reflections'

In commemorating the Second World War, the Singapore state has sought to claim a national history – based on the memory of what was essentially a colonial war – which is not only separated from that of its former colonist but also from Malaysia, with whom it shared an intertwined (colonial) history. In our analysis of the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* Centre, we have demonstrated how such interpretations of memoryscapes are profoundly unstable, alternatives to dominant readings emerging not only from 'within' but also from 'without' the nation. In the face of these challenges, we have outlined how the National Archives of Singapore attempted to nationalize the site both by universalizing and deracializing the narratives within it and by developing an explicitly geographical and emotionally charged approach to rendering its history. We argue that the implementation of these strategies seeks to blur any essentialized (racial) demarcations that may divide Singapore society, transforming them into more fluid means of identifications that

not only offer optimistic possibilities of empathetic reflection but can also be used to deny alternative counter-readings that may reassert fixed identity positions (i.e. Malay vs. non-Malays, Malaysian vs. Singaporean). The Centre thus hopes to fulfil two goals: to be relevant to all Singaporeans as a national site, regardless of their ethnicity; and to be so universally appealing as to make it relevant to all nationalities who visit it.

Despite these strategies taken to pre-empt possible contestations, however, the Centre has still been criticized – by a proportion of the Malay community – as another way in which the history of the Malays in Singapore has been marginalized. This alternative reading has arisen largely from contentions over issues of geographical accuracy, and over how history and race have been represented within the site, hence showing that a site's potentialities of meaning can be poly-vocal and may not necessarily fall into line with its producers' original intentions. While the idea of (national) reflections, intended by the NAS to allow visitors to empathize with the 'heroic virtues' of the MR's men (*vis-à-vis* their ethnicity), is appreciated by many, strong criticism, and the fact that visitorship has tended to be predominantly Malay, indicate that the Centre has remained one that is perceived as a specifically 'Malay' (rather than a 'national') memorial. We have also intimated how contestations over the site's interpretations may have also derived from Singapore's problematic colonial associations (as well as postcolonial ties) with neighbouring Malaysia: the 'postcolonial strivings of a national identity do not [and probably cannot] completely banish the colonial past'.[79] This is evidenced within the paper in two ways. First, we have shown how, even after attempts to play down Singapore's colonial links with Malaysia by focusing less on the birth-places of the MR's men than on the fact that they fought on Singaporean soil, debates still prevail, particularly over who should own them as heroes. Secondly, we have also demonstrated how, in attempting to diminish within the Centre any semblance of (colonial-inspired) ethnic differentiation and to construct a postcolonial narrative out of the (essentially colonial) war, such colonial imprints have arguably been made more obvious, as evidenced especially by some of the Malay visitors' comments which speak more of their ethnic (rather than national) affiliations. As such, in *Bukit Chandu*, discourses of nation-building, (post)colonial histories, geographical specificity, transnational relations and race are all mutually constitutive in (un)packing memoryscapes and negotiating their meanings. In showing how the Singapore state has tried (with limited success) to navigate these forces, we argue that differences over how a memoryscape may be 'read' can never be totally erased. Such landscapes, as embodiments of memory at various scales, not only commemorate war sites but are themselves 'fraught battlefields' of collective memory.

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Notes

[1] See M. Halbwachs, *On collective memory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992); J. R. Gillis, 'Memory and identity: the history of a relationship', in J. R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: the politics of national identity* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994).

[2] B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, Verso, 1983).

[3] For examples of how 'collective memories' are spatialized through landscapes to reflect dominant national ideologies, see N. Johnson, 'Cast in stone: monuments, geography and nationalism', *Environment and planning D: society and space* **13** (1995), pp. 51–65; K. Till, 'Staging the past: landscape designs, cultural identity and *Erinnerungspolitik* at Berlin's *Neue Wache*', *Ecumene* **6** (1999), pp. 251–83; M. Azaryahu, 'RePlacing memory: the reorientation of Buchenwald', C*ultural geographies* **10** (2003), pp. 1–20; M. Heffernan, 'For ever England: the western front and the politics of remembrance in Britain', *Ecumene* **2** (1995), pp. 293–323.

[4] D. Mitchell, *The lie of the land: migrant workers and the California landscape* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 27.

[5] For discussions on how dominant memories may be contested by alternative popular readings, see J.C. Leib, 'Separate times, shared spaces: Arthur Ashe, Monument Avenue and the politics of Richmond, Virginia's symbolic landscape', *Cultural geographies* **9** (2002), pp. 286–312; C. Withers, 'Place, memory, monument: memorializing the past in contemporary highland Scotland', *Ecumene* **3** (1996), pp. 325–44; A. Charlesworth, 'Contesting places of memory: the case of Auschwitz', *Environment and planning D: society and space* **12** (1994), pp. 579–93.

[6] D. Atkinson and D. Cosgrove, 'Urban rhetoric and embodied identities: city, nation and empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome, 1870–1945', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **88** (1998), pp. 29–30.

[7] P. Gough, 'Sites in the imagination: the Beaumont Hamel Newfoundland Memorial on the Somme', *Cultural geographies* **11** (2003), pp. 235–58.

[8] N. J. Saunders, 'Matter and memory in the landscapes of conflict: the Western Front 1914-1919, in B. Bender and M. Winer, eds, *Contested landscapes: movement, exile and place* (Oxford, Berg, 2001), p. 37.

[9] See S. Cooke, 'Negotiating memory and identity: the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, London', *Journal of historical geography* **26** (2000), pp. 449–65; J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995); see also D. Jeans, 'The First World War memorials in New South Wales: centers of meaning in the landscape', *Australian geographer* **19** (1988), pp. 259–67.

[10] T. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper, 'The politics of war memory and commemoration: contexts, structures and dynamics', in T. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper, eds, *The politics of war memory and commemoration* (London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 3–86. See for exceptions P. Raivo, 'Landscaping the patriotic past: Finnish war landscapes as a national heritage', *Fennia* **178** (2000), pp. 139–50; J. Foster, 'Creating a *temenos,* positing 'South Africanism': material memory, landscape practice, and the circulation of identity at Delville Wood', *Cultural geographies* **11** (2004), pp. 259–90.

[11] For examples, see V. Smith, 'War and its tourist attractions', in A. Pizam and Y. Mansfield eds, *Tourism, crime and international security issues* (Chicester, Wiley, 1996), pp. 247–64; J. Lennon and M. Foley, *Dark tourism* (London, Continuum, 2000).

[12] Though such tensions may sometimes lead to fruitful exercises in forging relations – such as when inter-nation commemoration leads to 'trans-border' sites through which the respective

war dead can be remembered – as well as to promoting peaceful causes between former adversaries in war. See P. Gough, 'From heroes' groves to parks of peace: landscapes of remembrance, protest and peace', *Landscape research* **25** (2000), pp. 213–28, for examples of how countries who have gone through similar historical experiences have sought to work together in the production of contemporary memoryscapes.

[13] This paper is based on information gathered through the textual analysis of the *Reflections of Bukit Chandu* and through interviews with its key personnel (e.g. the NAS officer in charge of the Centre, the former manager and the staff), as well as through feedback gathered from visitors either through personal interviews or from visitors' books at the Centre. In analysing the perspectives of the visitors, attention is paid to the viewpoints of the Malays who visit, although non-Malay perspectives have also been included. The reason for this ethnographic focus lies in the fact that, given that the site commemorates the *Malay* Regiment, visitors have tended to be Malays, making them the easiest to approach and solicit for an interview. Furthermore, upon analysing the data, we also found that the main contentions with regard to the site come predominantly from this particular ethnic community.

[14] B. Yeoh, 'Postcolonial cities', *Progress in human geography* **25** (2001), p. 461; see also D. Yang, 'The malleable and the contested: the Nanjing Massacre in postwar China and Japan', in T. Fujitani, G. White, and L. Yoneyama, eds, *Perilous memories: the Asia-Pacific Wars* (London, Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 50–85.

[15] The war in Singapore was mainly fought by Allied forces consisting of men from Great Britain, the USA, France, Holland, Australia and other former British dominions.

[16] D. Wong, 'Memory suppression and memory production: the Japanese occupation of Singapore', in T. Fujitani *et al.*, *Perilous memories: the Asia-Pacific Wars* (London, Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 218–38.

[17] This was essentially due to the fact that the Japanese treated the different races in Singapore differently. While they were very aggressive (and sometimes brutal) in their treatment of the Chinese because of the latter's affiliation with China, then Japan's sworn enemy, the Japanese soldiers generally treated the Malays and Indians very well, with the aim of winning them over with the propaganda of 'liberating' them from European imperialism.

[18] This is not to say that there was no commemoration of the war at all prior to this period. Many of the earlier instances of commemoration, however, were undertaken not by the state but by foreign and local private organizations. See K. Blackburn, 'Commemorating and commodifying the prisoner-of-war experience in Southeast Asia: the creation of Changi Prison Museum', *Journal of the Australian war memorial* **33** (2000), pp. 1–18.

[19] Wong, 'Memory production and memory suppression'.

[20] L. Hong and J. L. Huang, 'The scripting of Singapore's national heroes: toying with Pandora's box', in A. T. Ahmad and L. E. Tan, eds, *New terrains in Southeast history* (Singapore, Singapore University Press, 2003), p. 223.

[21] B. Yeoh and L. Kong, 'The notion of place in the construction of history, nostalgia and heritage in Singapore', *Singapore journal of tropical geography* **17** (1996), pp. 52–65.

[22] Wong, 'Memory production and memory suppression', p. 223.

[23] Major F. J. Lim, 'Of fighting spirit and flaming sword: reflections on our will and wherewithal to survive, defend and die for an island in the sun we own called home', *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* **28** (2002), pp. 1–13.

[24] Hong and Huang, 'The scripting of Singapore's national heroes'. See also K. Hack and K. Blackburn, *Did Singapore have to fall? Churchill and the impregnable fortress* (London, Routledge Curzon, 2004).

[25] *Straits Times*, 'Signboards will be put up to mark World War II sites' (1 Jan. 1992).

[26] Apart from historic markers, memorial sites have also taken the form of museums, monuments, commemorative dates and performative ceremonies as well as restored battle-sites.

[27] It is also further justified by the fact that most visitors to these sites continue to be foreign.

[28] The date chosen – coinciding with the fall of Singapore and the mark of Britain's failure to defend its dominions – is in itself symbolic; one need only recall how, immediately after the war, the British rejected local requests for a public procession commemorating the local dead, suggesting instead 15 August as a more suitable date, given its significance as the day the Second World War ended and the British were victorious.

[29] The NAS is a statutory board under the National Heritage Board 'responsible for the collection and management of the nation's public and private historical records'. In its brochure (n.d.), it is said to 'house the memory of the nation … the diversity, richness and historical development of our country' so as to enable 'generations of Singaporeans to not only understand and appreciate who they are and how they became a nation, but also enculturate a national identity that they will be proud to proclaim and share'.

[30] This is not the first instance of national recollection of the trials and tribulations of the *MR*. As part of the plaque-placing frenzy of the 1990s, a plaque was placed (and still exists) at the nearby Kent Ridge Park where the MR's story is related.

[31] Most of the exhibits in the Centre are borrowed from overseas institutions like the Imperial War Museum and the Australian Archives. During the research phase, field trips were also made to Malaysia as a means of garnering support for the Centre as well as to collect artefacts from living relatives.

[32] D. Brunero, 'Heritage and nationalism: a critique of *Reflections at Bukit Chandu*, paper presented at the Singapore–Malaysia Conference, National University of Singapore, 2002.

[33] *Ibid*.; see for examples *Straits Times*, 'Honour WWII defenders of Pasir Panjang Ridge' (25 Feb. 1992); 'Make bungalow at World War II battleground a museum' (1 Mar. 1992).

[34] This quote was taken from *Straits Times*, 'Stories of duty, honour, courage', (27 Dec. 2001).

[35] See Hack and Blackburn, *Did Singapore have to fall?*

[36] The major ethnic groups in Singapore are the Chinese (76.8%), Malays (13.9%), Indians (7.9%) and Eurasian/others (1.4%) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2000).

[37] A. Appadurai, 'The production of locality' in R. Fardon, ed., *Counterworks: managing the diversity of knowledge* (London, Routledge, 1995), p. 215.

[38] *Straits Times* (27 Dec. 2001).

[39] Hong and Huang, 'The scripting of Singapore's national heroes', p. 225. Earlier on, in recognition for Lt Adnan Saidi's wartime contributions to the cause of the empire, the British government had also posthumously given him the Star Medal, the Defence Medal, the War Medal and mention in dispatches; see *New Straits Times* (Malaysia), 'Posthumous gallantry award likely for WWII hero' (11 Dec. 1999).

[40] C. H. Lim, 'The battle of Pasir Panjang revisited', *Pointer* **28** (2002), pp. 1–6.

[41] Malaysia and Singapore gained their independence from the British in 1957 and 1965 respectively. For a brief transitory period, between 1963 and 1965, Singapore was merged with the then already independent Malaysia.

[42] Translated from S. Hafizzi, 'The development of Museums today and its hopes for the future', (Available at: www.muzium.terengganu.gov.my/web/shahrul.html (accessed Dec. 2003); see also *New Straits Times* (Malaysia), 'Proud traditions started in 1934' (28 June 1991).

[43] *Ibid*., (11 Dec. 1999).

[44] *Straits Times*, 'KL to make patriotic film on war hero' (13 Nov. 1999).

[45] Associate Professor Kevin Blackburn, personal interview, 2002.

[46] Hong and Huang, 'The scripting of Singapore's national heroes', p. 223.
[47] Cited in *ibid*., pp. 225–6.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 226
[49] *Straits Times*, 'Malay soldiers fought without question' (8 Apr. 1987).
[50] Gough, 'From heroes' groves to parks of peace', p. 220.
[51] *Pasir Panjang* might have been deemed unsuitable because it refers to a whole line of ridges of which Bukit Chandu was but one.
[52] Brunero, 'Heritage and nationalism', p. 12.
[53] V. Savage and B. Yeoh, *Toponymics: a study of Singapore street names* (Singapore, Eastern Universities Press, 2003), p. 219.
[54] P. Raivo, "This is where they fought": Finnish war landscapes as a national heritage', in Ashplant *et al*., eds., *The politics of war memory and commemoration,* p. 159. See also E. Ben-Ze'ev and E. Ben-Ari, 'War, heroism and public representations: the case of a museum of "co-existence" in Jerusalem', in E. Lomskey-Feder and E. Ben-Ari. eds, *The military and militarism in Israeli society* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 117–38.
[55] *Straits Times*, 'Stepping onto hallowed ground' (15 Feb. 2002).
[56] *Straits Times*, 'War exhibits more meaningful at historic spots' (2 Oct. 2003).
[57] The actual battleground was converted into a car park during the nearby Kent Ridge Park development project in 1987. Several other bungalows were also torn down as a result of this development (*Straits Times,* 1 Mar. 1992).
[58] Centre audio tour script.
[59] Brunero, 'Heritage and nationalism', p. 10.
[60] Compare this with the type of plants selected for the Commonwealth War cemeteries, which are to reflect 'versions of Britishness', 'powerfully symbolic spaces of Britain and empire'; see M. Morris, 'Gardens "for ever England": landscape, identity and the First World War British cemeteries on the Western Front', *Ecumene* **4** (1997), p. 411.
[61] For example, at one section of the Centre visitors are able to 'relive the Battle of Pasir Panjang through Binaural Sound Presentation' and lighting displays, where they can partake in the 'life-like quality audio effect' of actually being part of the war as it happens around them. As the official brochure of the Centre describes the experience: 'Feel the same impenetrable darkness that engulfed the soldiers … Feel the thunder of gunfire from machine guns … Feel the impact of impact of being shot … Feel the desperation' (official brochure, n.d.).
[62] The actual script is in Malay. The text here represents an abridged summary of what Lt Ibrahim Sidek's wife said, as translated by the Centre.
[63] Brunero, 'Heritage and nationalism', p. 11; this and the act of inviting surviving family members of the MR's men to commemorative occasions also serve to bring home the point that, in war, not only soldiers but also their close relations suffer.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 12.
[65] *Straits Times*, 'Survivors' art among WWII Centre Exhibits' (7 Feb. 2002).
[66] For example, the British divided Singapore City into separate enclaves where different ethnic groups could be settled. Such a method of 'divide and rule' allowed the British not only to ease the administration of the various groups but also to prevented any (racial) conflicts from erupting among the culturally different immigrant groups.
[67] NAS, Transcript of 'RBC: building on memories' video.
[68] This can be found on the Centre's official visitors' brochure.
[69] To provide another example, a map of Pasir Panjang on the ground floor, where the actual battle is illustrated and explained, is also filled almost exclusively with pictures of the British.

[70] This displays a mural version of one of the paintings by a (foreign) civilian internee, W. R. M. Haxworth, and a recording relating what life was like in Japanese-occupied Changi, where most of the (foreign) POWs were incarcerated.

[71] Hong and Huang, 'The scripting of Singapore's national heroes', p. 223

[72] Brunero, 'Heritage and nationalism'.

[73] This is to be read as emanating from the fact that Singapore lies largely among Malay-Muslim nations in Southeast Asia, and from the general fear of the (majority Chinese) state that in conflicts with these other nations, the Malays especially may behave more as Malay-Muslims than as loyal Singaporeans. See further L. Z. Rahim, *The Singapore dilemma: the political and educational marginality of the Malay community* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 100.

[74] *Ibid*.

[75] NAS, transcript of '*Reflections at Bukit Chandu*: building on memories' video; this emerges also in some of the messages in the visitors' books as well as from the many conversations we had with visitors to the site.

[76] At present, since there is no shuttle service between the main road and the Centre, visitors without their own transportation must walk up along a winding, steep slope to the Centre.

[77] The NAS officer in charge confirms this: 'up till November 2002, out of the 22 000 people who visited, only 20 per cent were walk-ins; the rest were students and tourists who come as part of in-coach tours.'

[78] This is due to the fact that the original plaque commemorating the MR was at Kent Ridge Park, put up as part of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. While the text on the plaque does not indicate the site as the original battlefield, some visitors might have left with that impression.

[79] Yeoh, 'Postcolonial cities', p. 459; see also J. M. Jacobs, *Edge of empire: postcolonialism and the city* (London, Routledge, 1996).